



Inspection Connection



Program News



The beginning of a new millennium is an opportune time to examine the status of our voluntary Seafood Inspection Program and to consider what the future holds for the Program and the services it offers.

by Samuel McKeen

Recent Developments:

The Program has been operating in NOAA and Commerce for nearly 30 years. During the last decade or so the popularity of HACCP-type systems has increased. (The voluntary Seafood Inspection Program was the first Federal program to offer a comprehensive voluntary, safety-quality-wholesomeness-proper labeling HACCP Program in 1992.) The voluntary Program's initial services have been enhanced not only by the addition of HACCP, but also in the areas of training (both domestic and international), and the growth of consultative services internationally in recognition that the United States imports about 63 percent of the seafood that Americans consume. Our HACCP Program was strengthened and renamed January 1 as the HACCP Quality Management Program (QMP) in order to better recognize its emphasis on quality and to differentiate it from safety-only HACCP programs.

Program management continues to evaluate options for improving services to customers as

well as increasing the Program's overall efficiency. A complete Program transfer to FDA continues to be the most promising single action that can achieve a broad range of improvements. This option also offers substantial benefits for FDA as the host agency.

In April 1999, the President sent the Congress a bill entitled: the "Voluntary Seafood Inspection Performance Based Organization Act of 1999." The purpose of this legislation is to transfer the entire Program to FDA, where it will function as a separate, fee-for-service activity. The President's Council on Food Safety, Cabinet Secretaries from the Departments of Health and Human Services and Commerce, and others continue to support the Program's transfer to FDA. (The Council's January 19, 2000, draft of their Strategic Plan for food safety notes that "...streamlining has already been initiated for seafood with the Administration proposal to consolidate federal seafood inspection by transferring the ... NOAA Seafood Inspection Program from DOC to FDA."). Although the Program can con-



tinue to provide high quality services and otherwise operate effectively from within Commerce, public policy benefits, improved service to customers, and operational efficiencies will result from a transfer to FDA.

The Program's operating costs continue to be fully recovered through user fees. Any surplus is used to build a reserve to account for variations between projected and actual demand. Although the Program's budget is generally predictable, projected demand can obviously vary by service during any year. One incentive for the Program's customers to support the transfer to FDA is the potential to substantially reduce the Program's overhead costs thereby saving the users money.

Looking to the Future:

Interest in both safe and high quality food will continue to grow. Highly visible activities continue to be pursued by the President's Council on Food Safety. Federal food safety budget requests have received good funding support from the Congress. Legislation is pending in the Congress to strengthen food safety by various means including organizational change. As pressures on the natural and cultured resource base expand, the desire to ensure that the resulting products are not only safe, but also wholesome, properly labeled and reflect the quality desired will further increase interest in and demand for seafood inspection. An increasingly informed consumer will also contribute toward this trend.

Final points of sale such as supermarkets and restaurants are increasingly specifying their desire to purchase inspected and certified seafood products. These buyers' requirements will set the standards in the marketplace. Producers will increasingly include inspection in their final equation in order to maximize marketing flexibility at a modest per-pound cost.

The Seafood Inspection Program's priorities

for FY 2000 and beyond include: (1) achieving enactment of legislation needed to transfer the Program to FDA; (2) strengthening the Program's customer service orientation (without diminishing the Program's outstanding reputation for professional expertise and overall credibility); (3) increasing interaction with customers to better understand what they need; and (4) strengthening further the Program's financial integrity.

In closing, I want to thank all who continue to support our Program. Going forward, we intend to increase the value of our services as we adjust to changing customer needs. The Program will continue to provide needed services at affordable prices while functioning as a highly credible, internationally recognized government authority.

Seafood Inspection is going "Global"

by Kimberly Young

In a continuing effort to promote the Seafood Inspection Program and its services, the program has entered into an agreement with the seafood division of GlobalFoodExchange.com (GFE).

Global Food Exchange
trade the world's harvest

GFE is proclaimed as the "internet's largest operator of trading communities for food commodities and products." They offer:

- 24 hour-a-day, 7 day-a-week exchanges
- Low cost method for buyers to source and purchase product
- The largest database of commodity food products, processors, buyers and associations
- Expanded market reach and instant e-commerce presence for sellers

GFE's commodity outreach includes seafood,



poultry, beef, pork, lamb, produce, and dairy, as well as prepared and packaged food and equipment.

The relationship between GFE and the Seafood Inspection Program is beneficial to both the industry and the Program. GFE is authorized to use the USDC Grade A, PUFI, and lot inspection marks on its website as appropriate to identify inspected product advertised for purchase.

Look for the USDC presence on GlobalFoodExchange.com in late March 2000.

Analytical Services Available

by Kenneth Aadsen

The Seafood Inspection Program has established an analytical laboratory in Gloucester, Massachusetts, to provide rapid test methodologies for several chemical and microbiological evaluations of seafood quality and safety. These services have been established for both Program use and private firms desiring analytical services.

Periodic laboratory testing will be conducted by the Program in order to verify that all Program participants with in-plant inspection activities (i.e., traditional Type 1, IQA, and HACCP) are manufacturing/distributing safe, wholesome and properly labeled products. Sampling of product forms and frequencies will be determined by the Program on a case-by-case basis. The costs for this verification function have been included in the current yearly fee base. In the event that routine oversight reveals a deficiency in sanitation, process control, and/or product integrity, additional laboratory testing may be warranted. Such additional testing for cause may incur specific charges to the individual firm. The Program will also provide analytical services for a fee to any requesting individual or processing establishment.

Advances in analytical technology have now made available several rapid tests that are validated by the Association of Analytical Chemists (AOAC), and routinely utilized by regulatory agencies as first-choice analysis. These methods save time and money for product assessments. Traditional AOAC methods may still be employed for confirming violative results.

Routine tests available include:

- Microbiological
 - Total aerobic plate count
 - Coliform/E. coli
 - Staph. aureus
 - Listeria
- Chemistry
 - Histamine
 - Sodium Bisulfite
 - Chloramphenicol

Further information regarding testing, sampling, or shipment of samples should be requested from the laboratory directly at the following address: Jane Fox-Dobson, C/O Massachusetts State Marine Fisheries, Annisquam River Marine Station, 30 Emerson Avenue, Gloucester, MA 01930, (978) 282-7463

Hawaii State Cooperative Agreement

Soon to be effective will be a Cooperative Agreement with the State of Hawaii's Department of Agriculture, which will bring the total of USDC/State inspection agreements to 15. The USDC will soon train two of the State's employees in all USDC procedures pertinent to seafood inspection activities within Hawaii. This will allow the State of Hawaii inspectors to conduct seafood inspection services and certify products on behalf of the USDC. The USDC/State cooperative inspection agreement is a cost-effective tool to provide seafood inspection services to its customers who depend upon the service to facilitate marketing of their seafood products.



HACCP-Quality Management Program Announced

After eight years of operating the first U.S. Government HACCP-based inspection program, the NOAA Seafood Inspection Program updated and renamed its service effective January 1, 2000, the HACCP-Quality Management Program (HACCP-QMP). While it remains a HACCP program it continues to address not only safety, but also wholesomeness, economic integrity (through proper labeling), and quality. The new name is intended to strengthen customers' recognition of quality management principles, reduce confusion among HACCP programs, and publicize the quality attributes of the Program.

The NOAA Seafood Inspection Program has long been recognized and respected internationally; both by industry and governments. To maintain this recognition, it is necessary to keep pace with changes that occur internationally, including changes in inspection methods and in quality practices. One of the changes has been the increased interest and use of quality management principles (such as those found in ISO 9001) in food inspection. This international recognition typically means greater market advantage for products that have been inspected by the Program.

The NOAA HACCP Program has always had a quality standard. However, this standard dates from 1972 and the last 30 years have seen advances in quality management practices. The new quality standard is based on the ISO 9000 series of quality standards which have been recognized internationally since 1985. The revised Program will also adopt the approach for quality and HACCP programs outlined by Codex Alimentarius (a joint food standards program of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and the World Health Organization). Participants in the NOAA HACCP-Quality Management Program will be in compliance with the FDA Seafood HACCP regulations and will also meet the applicable Codex Alimentarius guidelines. The Program is equivalent to and/or recognized by the Canadian Quality Management Program, the European Union directives, as well as inspection programs in Australia, New Zealand, and other countries that use similar systems.

Another major change in the Program involves the frequency of audits. Historical information has suggested that semi-annual audits are not generally sufficient to ensure full quality program compliance. Most firms have historically achieved an audit frequency of about eight audits per year. Following extensive discussion over frequency options, the normal level of audits will occur at a frequency of once per month with a reduced frequency level of once every three months. Current participants will be placed into the new frequency levels with as little financial impact as possible. Those participants at Level 1 under the former program will be "grandfathered" at a semi-annual inspection frequency as long as they avoid serious deficiencies.

Auditors from the Seafood Inspection Program will enhance their auditing skills by using internationally recognized standards as their base audit standard. The use of these standards will provide for a more uniform auditing practice and assist in defining internationally recognized practices in the evaluation of product, records and systems. Where applicable, recognized statistical methods and quality management principles will be used. In this way the Seafood Inspection Program personnel will be better equipped to provide sound quality system and management assistance to Program participants. The new design streamlines the review of records to only those samples necessary and minimizes the routine end-item evaluation of product.

The FDA HACCP regulations outline eight areas of sanitation that a firm must monitor and docu-



ment. The Seafood Inspection Program has modified its audit checklist to conform to these eight areas of sanitation. This action along with embracing the HACCP plan format from the Seafood HACCP Alliance should make these Program elements more transparent between agencies so that Program participants can more easily use one operating plan to meet multiple requirements.

Analytical testing will continue to be a part of the verification role for Program participants. Inspection personnel will be sampling product for analytical testing in order to verify that the Program as a whole is operating adequately. Efforts to better utilize the analytical sampling conducted by firms, coupled with tests conducted by the Program, will further enhance the positive documentation of the firm's effective control of hazards.

Seafood Inspection Program personnel will assist current Program participants in making any necessary changes to their plans. Current Program participants are advised to wait until contacted by Program personnel who will evaluate their current plans and guide the firm through the necessary changes and/or additions.

Customer Service Team

by Monty Berg

There is a better way of doing business for the Seafood Inspection Program. It is based upon the approach of doing good work with a focus on good customer service.

We are conducting meetings with companies and inspection staff nationwide to change the very culture of the Seafood Inspection Program. We will not compromise our credibility, the value of our work or services. However, we will take steps to ensure that every interested party has all the information available about our services. More importantly, if there are services we can

provide that we are not currently offering, we'll implement changes to respond to customers' needs.

Meetings with industry over the past few months have given us reason to believe that our efforts are achieving positive results. And thanks to the great work by field personnel and the positive response from industry, morale among the inspection staff has been elevated.

The simple fact is that we need to continue to work closely with the customers we serve. There's that word CUSTOMER again. Call us at 800-422-2750 or visit our website seafood.nmfs.gov. We're waiting to hear from you.

QUESTION CORNER



What are some of the things USDC inspectors look for in the plant?



- The construction and maintenance of plant equipment and facility
- The processing methods used
- The hygienic condition and practices of the plant personnel
- Overall sanitary conditions of the facility
- The appearance and odor/flavor of product



What can the USDC do for exporters?



- Certify to the foreign country's requirements
- Certify to the foreign buyer's specs
- Provide USDC export certificates for each lot of product inspected and certified

(Questions for the Inspection Connection may be mailed to Kimberly Young, USDC/NOAA, Seafood Inspection Program, 1315 East-West Highway, Room 10860, Silver Spring, MD 20910 or e-mailed via our web page at <http://seafood.nmfs.gov>)



CALENDAR

HACCP Workshops for Industry

The Industry HACCP course is an intense three day course that covers all aspects of the HACCP concept as it relates to seafood harvesting, processing, transporting, distributing and retailing.

March

14-16 Boston, MA
15-17 Seattle, WA

April

11-13 Newark, NJ
12-14 San Francisco, CA
17-19 Los Angeles, CA

May

Coming this month! Seafood
HACCP for Supermarkets!
Call for more information.
9-11 Gloucester, MA
20-22 Ft Lauderdale, FL

June

6-8 Seattle, WA
6-8 East Coast (TBA)
Seafood HACCP For Supermarkets
20-22 Baltimore, MD
27-30 Annapolis, MD
STT-150, Basic Shellfish

Upcoming Trade Shows

Look for our booth at the following shows:

Boston Seafood Show
March 7-9, 2000
Booth #1312

Brussels - Seafood Processing Europe
May 9-11, 2000
Booth #1247

National Restaurant Assoc. Hotel-Motel Show
May 20-23, 2000
Booth #4635

American School Food Service Association
July 17-19, 2000
Booth #TBA

Join us in Boston to test your sensory savvy. Our National Sensory Science and Training Sections will be conducting sensory evaluations and giving away great prizes. Also visit the USDC Trade and Industry Services booth (#3736) for all your questions on trade issues.

TRAWLING THE NET

The Trade Information Center is a comprehensive resource for information on all Federal Government export assistance programs. Visit their website at: www.ita.doc.gov/tic

Looking for the latest in seafood market prices and trading? GlobalFoodExchange.com is the place:
globalseafoodexchange.com



Copies of this newsletter can be obtained at <http://seafood.nmfs.gov> or you can be added to the mailing list by mailing the following to: Documentation Approval and Supply Services Section, USDC/NOAA, 3207 Frederic Street, Suite B, PO Drawer 1207, Pascagoula, MS 39568-1207.

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